

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 15, 2015

Agenda Item: 2015 Grazing & Sharecrop Leases – Ear Mountain WMA Salmond Ranch Grazing Lease South Pasture

Division: Wildlife **Action Needed:** Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background

Beginning in 1991, a rest-rotation grazing system was established with the Salmond Ranch. The system focuses on the approximately 2,100-acre south pasture to allow for cattle grazing to be used as a management tool. The system aims to help maintain plant productivity and palatability of native grasses and forbs for the benefit of wildlife on Ear Mountain Wildlife Management Area. Under this lease, year-round and seasonal forage for mule deer, bighorn sheep, and other big game will be maintained. Public hunting access on the property is incorporated within the grazing lease.

Public Involvement Process & Results

In January 2015, FWP issued a draft environmental assessment and solicited public comment for a 35-day period for the proposed Ear Mountain WMA grazing lease with the Salmond Ranch Co. No public comments were received so no modifications were made to the EA. The EA along with the stipulations outlined in the decision notice were considered final, and the South pasture agreement with the Salmond Ranch Co. is contingent on Commission approval. There is a separate lease renewal with the Gollehon Ranch for a north pasture on the WMA, which was covered within the same EA noted above. However, given that the north pasture lease is valued less than \$5,000, Commission approval of that lease is not required. No public comment was received for either lease.

Alternatives and Analysis

The alternative would be to not use a grazing management lease on Ear Mountain WMA. Over time, forage quality for big game would decline. The Salmond Ranch would be required to find additional grazing pasture elsewhere and hunting access there may not be available to the public.

Agency Recommendation & Rational

FWP recommends proceeding with the south grazing lease with the Salmond Ranch Co. on the WMA. Continuing to implementing the proposed grazing plan would maintain plant productivity and palatability of native grasses and forbs for the benefit of wildlife. The Salmond Ranch would benefit from the availability of early and late summer pasture for their cattle. As a prerequisite to this lease, public hunting opportunity would continue to be allowed on the lessee's property.

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission approve renewal of the south pasture lease on Ear Mountain WMA with the Salmon Ranch Co. for the 2015–2017 period.